

CURRENTLY, THE Department of Ecology (Ecology) has adequate funding to support the work of Water Conservancy Boards in processing water right change applications.

Furthermore, the department has flexibility in its budget to respond to any unanticipated increase in the need to provide support and training for conservancy boards. This includes reviewing and responding to any increased number of applications that conservancy boards might process.

Water Conservancy Boards have indicated they are generally receiving adequate training, technical assistance, and review of permit decisions from Ecology.

Background

In 1997, legislation was enacted which authorized counties to establish Water Conservancy Boards. Once approved for establishment, the county legislative authority appoints members to the board. Boards may commence with reviewing water right change applications after board members have received training provided by Ecology.

Boards are authorized to accept and process applications to change existing water rights. Boards forward their records of decision to Ecology, which then has forty-five days to affirm, reverse or modify the board decision. Boards may request technical assistance and advice from Ecology when reviewing an application. Ecology also

periodically provides continuing education opportunities in the form of recommended readings, advanced training and workshops for board members. Board members may also qualify for continuing education credit by attending water law seminars or other relevant training.

In 1999, Ecology adopted rules governing the operation of Water Conservancy Boards. These rules were appealed. The outcome of the appeal was to considerably narrow the scope of boards' authority. Legislation passed in 2001 amended the conservancy board statute to clarify the scope of boards' authorities such that they can address all of the types of changes that Ecology can address. Due to this legislation, Ecology filed for adoption of an amended rule on December 9, 2002.

Twenty-One Water Conservancy Boards have been established around the state and all board members have received initial training. Appendix A provides a list of the boards that have been established to date and a summary of their decisions.

During the two-year period beginning November 1, 2000 and ending October 31, 2002, boards have accepted a total of 249 applications for change and have rendered decisions on 105 of these applications.

Ecology's 2002 *Water Conservancy Boards* report to the Legislature can be viewed on Ecology's website: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/biblio/0211017.html>